

EXHIBIT 58

Columbia President Says One Thing to Trump Admin—and Another in Private



(PHOTO BY SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES)

In a call with faculty, Katrina Armstrong says the school plans not to stick to some of its agreements with the Trump administration.

By Maya Sulkin

03.25.25 — Education

416 221  



UPGRADE TO LISTEN

5 MINS

In a private Zoom call over the weekend, interim Columbia president Katrina Armstrong told approximately 75 faculty members that, contrary to her public statements, the school has no plans to meet some key demands made by the Trump administration for Columbia to win back \$400 million worth of federal funding.

According to a transcript of the call obtained by *The Free Press*, Armstrong promised that there would be “no change to masking,” and “no change to our admissions procedures,” both of which the administration has demanded. What’s more, she said the school would not put its [Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies](#) (MESAAS) department under “academic receivership” for a minimum of five years—another Trump demand. She also told faculty members that “discipline remains independent” and “has not been moved to my office,” as the Trump administration’s antisemitism task force had insisted.

This is in direct contradiction to Columbia’s public promises to the White House.

After the school was [stripped of \\$400 million worth of federal funding](#) earlier this month for having “failed to protect American students and faculty from antisemitic violence and harassment,” the task force sent a letter to the university [detailing how it could earn back](#) the federal money. Last week, in a memo to the Trump administration, Columbia agreed to the task force’s demands—which also included the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s [definition of antisemitism](#).

A source close to the antisemitism task force told *The Free Press* that the revelations from Armstrong’s call could blow up its deal with the administration. “Columbia should not test the administration’s resolve in

holding them to every action they've agreed to take to protect their students and faculty," the source said. "We expect full compliance and good faith negotiations if Columbia wants to have a productive relationship with the federal government."

For now, however, Secretary of Education Linda McMahon says that she believes Armstrong will keep her word. Asked about the possibility that Columbia might ignore the terms of the deal it just agreed to, McMahon told *The Free Press* she "believed [Armstrong] is absolutely dedicated and committed to making sure that students on her campus are safe and that civil rights are not in any way being impacted."



KATRINA ARMSTRONG VIA COLUMBIA.EDU

She added: "They have to abide and comply with the terms that we have sat down and talked with them [about] and that they've agreed to."

A Columbia spokesperson told *The Free Press* that Armstrong "has been clear that she wants to constructively engage with our regulators" and "is fully committed to the actions announced on Friday to combat antisemitism and all forms of discrimination which have no place in our community."

The spokesperson also told *The Free Press* that "individuals participating in demonstrations, including those who wear face masks or face coverings, must present their University ID when asked by a University official. Face coverings used to conceal one's identity while violating university rules, policies, or the law are not allowed on campus."

In a statement [published Tuesday](#), Armstrong said, "I regret any confusion and inconsistent statements and want to make sure our position is clear as we go forward." Armstrong restated the action the school claims to be taking to combat antisemitism and added: "Let there be no confusion: I commit to seeing these changes implemented, with the full support of Columbia's senior leadership team and the Board of Trustees."

The transcript reveals the depth of the faculty's frustration with Armstrong's effort to get Columbia's funding restored. Many on the call argued that she should not have made any concessions to the administration, with some faculty members saying they were "appalled" and "profoundly disappointed" with Armstrong, and wondered why the school capitulated to "an authoritarian government." Some questioned why the university hadn't sued the administration to restore its funding.

"This is a crisis not just for Columbia, its biggest crisis since the founding of the republic, but for all universities in this great country," said one faculty member during the call.

Armstrong warned colleagues of the possibility of further funding cuts. “The ability of the federal administration to leverage other forms of federal funding about us in an immediate fashion is really potentially devastating to our students in particular,” she said. “I think [this] is a really critical risk for us to understand.”

At multiple points during the call, Armstrong reiterated her position that the school would not enact the reforms it has committed to publicly.

Later on in the meeting, when describing a new hire to help with the MESAAS department, Columbia provost Angela Olinto clarified that “this is not a receivership. . . . The provost will not be writing or controlling anything. It’s the faculty. Our goal is to just coordinate.” After some pushback, Armstrong doubled down: “There’s no receivership, no intent for receivership.”

Armstrong and Olinto said they would refuse to accept five of the [nine demands](#) made by the administration’s antisemitism task force, according to the transcript. The demands they said they would adhere to related to discipline enforcement; so-called “time, place, and manner rules,” which would restrict protests on campus; internal law enforcement; and a plan to hold student groups accountable.

The conditions for Columbia to win back its funding, which were laid out in a letter earlier this month, were the “bare minimum” the government was insisting upon, one person familiar with the matter [told The Free Press at the time](#). “This is what’s required for Columbia to even be invited to a negotiating table.”

Columbia is one of 60 colleges and universities [under investigation](#) by the administration for failing to control antisemitism on its campus. It is the first institution to have its funding cut. In the 18 months since October 7, 2023, protesters at Columbia have [taken over](#) buildings, set up [encampments](#), interrupted classes, and assaulted janitors. Jewish students at the school say they have been subjected to antisemitic violence and harassment.

When one faculty member pointed out the difference between Armstrong’s public statements and what she was telling them in private, the transcript shows no recorded response from Armstrong. Later on in the meeting, Armstrong said that she just wants “everybody to understand the process gets subverted by things that happen sometimes outside the institutional voice.”

Lawyers from the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Civil Rights are due to visit Columbia’s campus this week to investigate potential violations of federal civil rights law, *The Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) Monday.

Also on Monday, a letter [was released](#) signed by over 600 Jewish faculty members, scholars, and students across various U.S. universities outlining their strong opposition to the funding cuts. “Harming U.S. Universities does not protect Jewish people,” the letter reads. “Cutting funding for research does not protect Jewish people. Punishing researchers and scholars does not protect Jewish people. These actions do, however, limit opportunities for students and scholars—within the Jewish community and beyond—to receive training, conduct research, and engage in free expression.”

At the end of the meeting, Armstrong said to her colleagues: “I think us all kind of taking a moment to walk in each other’s shoes is really what makes me proudest of this university and it’s just been an extraordinary experience to watch people be able to do that and commit to doing that.”



Become a Paid Subscriber

Get access to our comments section, special columns like TGIF and Things Worth Remembering, tickets in advance to our live events, and more.

ALREADY A PAID SUBSCRIBER? [SWITCH ACCOUNTS](#)

Maya Sulkin

Maya Sulkin is a reporter and assistant editor. Before that, Maya was chief of staff at *The Free Press*. She started as an intern in 2021 while a student at Columbia University.

TAGS: [COLUMBIA](#) [CAMPUS WARS](#)



MAKE A COMMENT



LIKE ARTICLE



SHARE ARTICLE

Comments

Join the conversation

Share your thoughts and connect with other readers by becoming a paid subscriber!

[UPGRADE TODAY](#)

ALREADY A PAID SUBSCRIBER? [SIGN IN](#)

More in Columbia